

Dolphin Died of Pneumonia

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Pneumonia is believed to be the primary cause of death of the dolphin that swam into Island Creek two weeks ago, according to New England Aquarium officials.

Spokesperson Tony La Casse said that according to gross autopsy results, the dolphin's pneumonia was so severe that both of the mammal's lungs were wet and one contained a large amount of fluid.

The autopsy further determined that the dolphin's stomach was completely empty and the animal was underweight.

"The dolphin looked like it had a lot of girth [when swimming in the creek], but he had not eaten in a while," said La Casse. "Since he was underweight, this is an indication that he used up some of his body reserve...he was definitely tapping into that."

He added that the aquarium was not positive whether the dolphin was not eating well due to the underlying pneumonia.

Although the dolphin was not trailing any fishing gear when found on September 23, biologists also noticed scarring on the animal indicating that he had some history of entanglement in the past.

La Casse said that autopsy results identified the dolphin as a sub-adult male based on the lack of teeth wear and scarring which would indicate some rough play among younger dolphins.

The aquarium will conduct DNA tests to see if the dolphin was a coastal or pelagic (open-ocean) species, indicating what group of animals may be present in area waters. Those tests as well as pathology tests on lesions found on the dolphin may take weeks to return to the aquarium, said La Casse.

On behalf of the entire aquarium, La Casse thanked all of those who offered their assistance to the Rescue and Rehab Team with boats, water access and other help getting the dolphin out of the creek.

"This is very consistent with [the aquarium's] relationship with the Duxbury community," said La Casse.

La Casse also wanted to clarify what some saw as a slow response time by the Rescue and Rehab Team to respond to the stranded dolphin.

The dolphin was discovered around 7 a.m. by a jogger who called Duxbury police. An aquarium volunteer was then dispatched to keep the aquarium informed on the animal's progress, giving them useful information to respond. The aquarium's team did not arrive until after 10 a.m.

La Casse explained that while the team is seen as the 911 for marine animals, they do not have the same budgetary capacities as other emergency response authorities for citizens.

"While Duxbury, for example, might spend several hundred thousand dollars for adequate 911 services for humans, we operate the Rescue and Rehab Team with a much smaller budget," said La Casse.

These limited funds go towards four full-time employees and equipment that respond to emergencies in three states as well as care for rescued animals, he said.

Furthermore, La Casse said that the team begins their day at 9 a.m. like most businesses and by the time it loaded its emergency vehicle with supplies for this particular situation, they were on the road by 9:15-9:20 a.m. Battling traffic getting out of Boston, he said, the team arrived in Duxbury an hour later.

"We have to work with the resources we have and we are lucky to have dedicated volunteers in Duxbury," said La Casse. "Our team was motivated to get there and we want to fix everything in the particular circumstances [we are called to]."



Despite being visibly wounded, a severe case of pneumonia is believed to be the cause of death for the dolphin who died in Island Creek on September 23.